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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
- [1](#)2. US-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

The media continued to highlight Acting PM Ehud Olmert's efforts to form a government coalition. Yediot and Israel Radio quoted Olmert as saying Monday that it can be assumed that if the Labor Party joins the coalition, Kadima will have to give up one of the two important portfolios -- finance or defense. However, Israel Radio and other media quoted senior Kadima members as saying that the likelihood of the finance portfolio being transferred to a coalition partner is very slim. Israel Radio quoted Olmert as saying that he is not ruling out any coalition partners provided they back his political plan. Ha'aretz reported that Olmert's advisers are divided over whether to bring the Labor Party into the coalition. Maariv, which wrote that Kadima is prepared to hand the Defense Ministry and apparently the Education Ministry, to the Labor Party, quoted senior Kadima members as saying that if Labor declines to renounce the finance portfolio, Kadima could form a coalition with the Likud, Yisrael Beiteinu, the ultra-Orthodox parties (Shas and United Torah Judaism), and the Gil pensioners' party. The Jerusalem Post reported that in the coalition taking shape, Olmert would offer Peretz the defense portfolio and a senior portfolio to Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman. Major media reported that Shas intends to recommend that President Moshe Katsav choose Olmert as the politician who will form the next government.

Israel Radio reported that Olmert and Peretz will hold a joint conference this afternoon. The radioreported that the two leaders will apparently report on preliminary coalition talks between their two parties, and that Peretz will subsequently convene party members to update them on coalition talks.

In its lead story, Ha'aretz reported that UN aid organizations are warning that the Gaza Strip is on the verge of a humanitarian disaster due to lack of money and food.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior EU official as saying Monday that if Olmert consults the international community before implementing his "convergence" plan, one suggestion he is likely to hear is that Israel should lease the settlements blocs from the PA rather than annex them outright.

Major media reported that on Monday, Raed Abayat, a senior Fatah-Tanzim militant, was killed in an exchange of fire with IDF soldiers near Bethlehem.

Ha'aretz cited AP that on Monday in Amman, Jordanian PM Marouf Al-Bakhit told Assistant Secretary of State for

Near East Affairs David Welch that the US must intensify efforts to restart Mideast negotiations.

Maariv reported that Israeli political and security officials have drafted a blacklist of countries that hold -- or will hold -- contacts with Hamas. The newspaper reported that on Monday, IDF Radio detailed the countries in question. Maariv reported that Russia, India, and possibly France have already conducted talks with Hamas. The newspaper reported that China is secretly considering holding contacts with Hamas. The newspaper cited Israel's concern that Venezuela and other Latin American countries could open a dialogue channel with Hamas as part of their effort to fight US policy. Maariv also cited Israel's concern that the UN has unofficially conveyed messages to Hamas members. This morning, Israel Radio quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Ali Abu al-Gheit as saying that Palestinian FM Mahmoud Zahar has arrived in Cairo for talks.

Israel Radio and The Jerusalem Post's web site cited the London-based Al-Hayat as saying that an Al-Qaida affiliated group operating in Gaza is planning terrorist attacks against sensitive targets in the area. Al-Hayat was also cited as saying that Al-Qaida recently appointed a chief for the region of Jordan, Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

The Jerusalem Post reported that an Israeli defense source told the newspaper on Monday that the high-speed underwater missile recently launched by Iran was not operational and that Iran had conducted the test "to flex its muscles" in the face of international pressure to suspend its nuclear program.

Hatzofe reported that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas is the only senior Palestinian who still holds a valid VIP document issued by the Israeli defense establishment.

Yediot reported that Finance Ministry officials are preparing drastic cuts in the defense budget, as it is proposed that 2 billion shekels (around USD 430 million) be moved to social issues. Yediot wrote that Olmert is expected to support the plan.

Ha'aretz quoted several senior PA officials as saying this week that Hamas plans to rebuild the Palestinian police force in an effort to restore law and order to the Palestinian street.

Ha'aretz reported that MK Silvan Shalom intends, in the near future, to call for a leadership showdown to replace Binyamin Netanyahu as Likud chairman.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that Israel is to host an international conference on the threat to civil air traffic by shoulder-launched missiles. The conference, to take place this week, is being organized by the Foreign Ministry's departments for weapons monitoring and will bring together delegates from 25 countries, among them the US, the EU, Russia, China, India, Brazil, and Argentina. The Jerusalem Post wrote that the seminar will take place on Wednesday.

Yediot quoted Prince Turki al-Faysal, the Saudi Ambassador to the US, as saying last week in San Francisco before the Council on Foreign Relations that the destruction of Iraq's nuclear reactor by Israel was a positive step.

Leading media reported that PM Sharon was to undergo an operation this afternoon, to reattach a bone in his skull that was removed during the first surgery he underwent when he was hospitalized three months ago. Ha'aretz reported that the operation is intended to prepare Sharon for a move to a chronic care facility, or following special preparations, to his home at Sycamore Ranch. This morning, Ha'aretz's web site reported that the surgery was postponed due to a mild respiratory infection.

Hatzofe reported that the Committee to Release Jonathan Pollard has asked the Shas party to demand that the new government decide upon its establishment to ask the US to release the convicted spy. Hatzofe cited the committee's assertion that the Gil pensioners' party, headed by Pollard's control officer Rafi Eitan, should include in its coalition negotiations a "minimal" demand to have Pollard released.

All media (banners in The Jerusalem Post and Hatzofe) reported that on Monday, AG Menachem Mazuz strongly urged Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger to resign voluntarily because he appeared to lack the necessary qualities for such high office. The media quoted Mazuz

as saying that if he does not resign, he will recommend that the Justice Minister begin proceedings to remove him from his post. The police had investigated Rabbi Metzger on suspicion of having stayed at a major Jerusalem hotel over the 2004 Passover holiday without paying for room or board. The media cited Metzger's intention to petition the High Court of Justice.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "If Peretz the moderate and dovish politician overcomes Peretz the suspicious and power-hungry one, and accepts the defense portfolio, the evacuation of the settlements will go ahead in the good and reasonable spirit that he proposes in his platform."

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The Labor Party shouldn't be the coalition-maker's first target. Kadima had actually better foster the dialogue with potential partners on the Right."

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in Maariv: "These elections were a decision over an ideology of principle, and not voting was also a decision. The decision was that Israel will continue to separate from the Palestinians."

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "As Hamas prepares for war on all levels, Israel is about to form a government led either by Kadima or Labor whose politicians insist on pretending that there is no problem here."

MJ Rosenberg, Director of Policy Analysis for the Israel Policy Forum, wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "We are at a moment of equilibrium. We have a new Palestinian government, democratically elected, and a new Israeli government, democratically elected."

Block Quotes:

I. "Dangerous Liaisons"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (April 4): "Just a week has gone by since the elections, and already the political establishment is caught up in a logic-defying whirlwind that has at least a hint of the malodorous about it. [Labor Party Chairman] Amir Peretz's efforts to form a government under his leadership and in partnership with the right wing raise harsh questions.... Olmert could have prevented the aggressive and confusing ongoings had he told Peretz the day after the elections that he views him as a senior partner in the government, with all that such a position entails.... The impression created is that Kadima is accepting Labor under duress, and wishes to weaken it.... Peretz, for his part, must get down from his high horse and make his demands clear. From numerous points of view, he would be better off, in fact, going for the defense portfolio and not the treasury. As defense minister, Peretz would be the Prime Minister's most senior partner when it comes to all the political decisions Israel faces.... Contrary to its image, the Defense Ministry is a distinctly social-oriented one, which has a sway over important organizations and a broad population. If Peretz the moderate and dovish politician overcomes Peretz the suspicious and power-hungry one, and accepts the defense portfolio, the evacuation of the settlements will go ahead in the good and reasonable spirit that he proposes in his platform, and he will pave himself a wide road for the furthering of his political career. If not, he will be remembered by the voter as the man who in the throes of the coalition talks lost his world."

II. "Look Rightwards"

Senior columnist Dan Margalit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (April 4): "The Labor Party shouldn't be the coalition-maker's first target. Kadima had actually better foster the dialogue with potential

partners on the Right. Olmert has presented a clear political program. He honored the Roadmap, but he believes that there's no one to talk to in Ramallah.... The government must dispatch authorized, erudite, and reliable spokesmen to the settlements -- not in order to argue and annoy, but to present its view and convince. There is a reasonable chance that some of the 'orange' people change their minds; I dare say that many of them will support 'convergence'.... The 23 Knesset seats garnered by Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu are more important than Labor and Meretz's 24 Knesset members."

III. "Decision Despite Apathy"

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in Maariv (April 4): "Despite everything that can be said about apathy, these elections were a decision over an ideology of principle, and not voting was also a decision. The decision was that Israel will continue to separate from the Palestinians.... A decision about another disengagement is not necessarily a happy matter, therefore these elections were without enthusiasm and passion. Disengagement is more than the breaking of a dream (both on the Right as well as the Left); it is more of a medical procedure than of an attractive vision. It is healthy and even necessary, but like surgery, it isn't something you look forward to with anticipation."

IV. "'Let's Ignore Hamas'"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 4): "Last Thursday the first jihadist government since the Taliban ascended to power. The induction of the Hamas government in the Palestinian Authority has created a new dynamic in the Middle East.... Hamas's rise to power renders it all but impossible to deny the connection between the insurgency in Iraq and the global jihad in general and the Palestinian war with Israel. Indeed, in his first statement as foreign minister, Mahmoud Zahar attacked the US claiming, 'America is committing big crimes against the Arab and Islamic countries.' Yet as Hamas prepares for war on all levels, Israel is about to form a government led either by Kadima or Labor whose politicians insist on pretending that there is no problem here.... The Taliban's rise to power was greeted by indifference from the international community. Every once in awhile, Mullah Omar and his buddies would be caught stoning women to death or blowing up Buddhist monuments and would receive global reprimands for a few days. Although it was shunned by all countries except Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the Taliban's global isolation did not seem to inhibit its commitment to jihad. In the end, the Taliban were only forced to change the way they did business when the US military brought down their regime after they enabled the September 11 attacks. Is there anyone willing to draw any lesson from the last jihadist government in their dealings with the newest one?"

V. "Let's Seize the Opportunity"

MJ Rosenberg, Director of Policy Analysis for the Israel Policy Forum, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (April 4): "Olmert may be eager to end the occupation, but Hamas can very easily make that almost impossible. The ball is in Hamas's court. Its response to last week's killing of four Israelis in the West Bank (although not perpetrated by Hamas or its affiliates) could indicate whether, just possibly, Israel and the new Palestinian Authority can reach some form of accommodation, or if Israelis and Palestinians are both going to be subjected to the resumption of deadly violence that will, once again, not only take innocent lives but kill off economic growth, tourism and hopes for a better future for both peoples. We are at a moment of equilibrium. We have a new Palestinian government, democratically elected, and a new Israeli government, democratically elected. Those anxious to disturb that equilibrium had better understand precisely what they are doing and how their actions will affect those they profess to care about. "

2. US-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Jonathan S. Tobin, Executive Editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Rather than worrying so

much about the popularity of Israel on the Right, liberals need to start worrying about how unpopular it is on the Left."

Block Quotes:

"The Paranoid Style of American Anti-Israel Politics"

Jonathan S. Tobin, Executive Editor of The Jewish Exponent in Philadelphia, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 4): "While Pat Buchanan of the troglodyte Right once falsely referred to Congress as 'Israeli-occupied territory,' it is the American university that has become more and more a place where pro-Israel students and teachers often feel unable to speak their minds publicly.... Rather than worrying so much about the popularity of Israel on the Right, liberals need to start worrying about how unpopular it is on the Left. The point that so perplexes [Americans professors John] Mearsheimer and [Stephen] Walt -- the pro-Israel consensus -- ought to remind us that support for Israel is neither the property of the Left or the Right. It would be just as illogical to reject liberals who love Israel, as it is to condemn conservatives who do so. It would be a mistake to conclude that the authors of 'The Lobby' are the only people with glittering credentials and the ability to influence students who feel as they do. Rather than laugh at them, we should be thinking hard about just how deep the roots of hatred for Israel run in our most prestigious schools. And that is a variety of academic politics where the stakes are very high indeed."

JONES